

THE NOTION OF TEXT AND THE NOTION OF DOCUMENT — WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

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The origins of the notion of both text and document can be traced back to antiquity. Over the course of their respective histories – which I will not go into at this juncture – the meanings of both terms have evolved. Beyond the commonly used meanings, there are numerous other usages in various fields of specialization.

In the context of literary scholarship – primarily regarding literature published since the second half of the 20th century – the standardizations within the publishing industry have led to analyses and interpretations that are mostly distinct from the medium itself. Due to the rise of the so-called new media and new types of text, however – be they in the form of computer games, hypertext fiction, internet archives, or digital manuscripts – a growing number of literature scholars are aware of the fact that materiality must be taken into consideration along with content, and that this is valid for both electronic texts and texts in codex format. Nonetheless, we tend to hang on to the expression “text” – whether this is based on tradition or due to a lack of a better word. Only new compounds emerge in technical literature: “hypertext” (Bolter: 1991), “paratext” (Genette: 1989), “technotext” (Hayles: 2002), “cybertext” (Aarseth: 1995) as well as the application of a broad notion of text that views all systems of signs and symbols as text and consists of “alphanumeric characters, spoken language, music, still pictures or moving pictures, to mention only a few examples” (Gunder: 2001, 86). Coming from a bibliographic tradition, others attempt to link text and document with one another, establishing a bibliographical unit with terms such as “work text” and “document text” (Dahlström: 2002, 81).

The names and examples given here belong to a wide variety of disciplines, such as literary scholarship (Genette, Gunder, Hayles), Media Studies (Bolter, Aarseth), and Library and Information Sciences (Dahlström, Dalgaard). The boundaries between these tend to be fairly fluid though, since they are all involved with what we refer to as new

media. In the cases in which a distinction is made between document and text, this is made within a hierarchy of document - text - work, as described by David Levy, who wrote:

In this division of responsibilities, a document is a physical artifact bearing meaning – or information-bearing symbols; a work is the essential meaning or idea that is being communicated; and a text is that which mediates between document and work: a sequence of words which, as the expression of a work, can be realized or embodied in one or more documents. These notions thus typically form an abstraction hierarchy: from the fully concrete document to the abstract text to the even more abstract work. (Levy: 2003)

Traced to its etymological roots of “doceo + mentum” by Niels W. Lund, the notion of document has rarely been applied within the Humanities and even been met with some resistance. This may have to do with the fact that it includes social and mental aspects in it as well as material aspects. At once broad and more general, Lund’s notion of document can be interpreted on the one hand as a reaction to the history and development of term and on the other hand as its continued development in the present.¹ The question of the extent to which documents can be described as true or untrue, correct or incorrect, is no longer relevant to Lund’s notion of document.

Of particular interest regarding Lund’s notion of document are Aarseth’s “cybertext” term and Hayles’s “technotext” term, as both imbue the material aspects with essential meaning. In order to do justice to the physical form of literary texts, Hayles suggests the term “technotext,” “a term that connects the technology that produces texts to the texts’ verbal constructions” (Hayles: 2002, 25f.). Hayles asks:

Perhaps it is time to think the unthinkable – to posit a notion of text that is not dematerialized and that does depend on the substrate in which it is instantiated. Rather than stretch the fiction of dematerialization thinner and thinner, why not explore the possibilities of texts that thrive on the entwining of physicality with informational structure? (Hayles: 2003, 275)

¹ On the various traditions cf. Lund:Lund: 2003.

Aarseth's term "cybertext" encompasses the material and social aspects as well as the mental aspects, and thus is in close proximity to Lund's notion of document.

[...] a text can never be reduced to a stand-alone sequence of words. There will always be context, convention, contamination; socio-historical mediation in one form or another. [...] Instead of defining a text as a "chain of signifiers," as linguists and semioticians do, I will here use the word for a whole range of different phenomena, from short poems to complex computer programs and data bases. As the "cyber"-prefix indicates, the text is seen as a machine, not metaphorically but as a mechanical device for the production/consumption of verbal signs. Just as a film is useless without a projector and a screen, so a text must consist of a material medium as well as a collection of words. (Aarseth: 1995, 22ff.)

However, if the majority of literature scholars were to agree with the assertion that the book publication of a novel constitutes the same text as that novel in Braille, as a book-on-tape, as a hypertext, film, or computer game (cf. Hayles: 2003, 266), we must ask which terms lend themselves to indicate the *differences* between these objects.

As long as we engage ourselves with literary texts that consist exclusively of writing, the notion of text may still be appropriate. Social and material aspects of a written document can be described using such terms as "context" and "paratext." As soon as we come across a text that combines several media such as text and image, or we find a text that is available in various versions and/or media, the notion of text encounters difficulties. I'd like to illustrate this assertion with an example from literature: Christa Wolf: *Cassandra*. Four Lectures. A Narrative (1983). This example, a widely read text by a well-known East German author, is a somewhat random choice. The large quantity of secondary literature on the work is based almost without exception on the "text" *Cassandra*.²

As with most of the texts by Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* appeared almost simultaneously in the East German publishing house Aufbau and in the West German Luchterhand. Over the years, reprints and other editions

² West German reviewers pointed out that an abbreviated and censored version of *Cassandra* had been published in the GDR. Of course, this was done for political reasons, not for scholarly ones. The passages that had been removed were published in *FAZ* on February 25, 1984.

followed, such as that of the Leipzig publishing house, Reclam, with etchings by Nuria Quevedo. As early as 1984 and 1985, numerous translations of the lectures and the narrative or just the narrative alone appeared. The handwritten manuscript of *Cassandra* and various preparatory works are located in the Academy of the Arts' Christa Wolf Archive in Berlin. Beyond these various editions of the book, a radio play version by Gerhard Wolf – Christa Wolf's husband –, an opera, a dance theater piece, and different stage performances emerged.

Furthermore, *Cassandra* has – as do many texts in the literature of the German Democratic Republic – an unusual progenesis. In March 1983, *Cassandra* appeared in the West German publishing house, Luchterhand, in two separate editions: the Frankfurt poetics lectures as “precursors to a narrative” and the narrative *Cassandra*. The one-volume edition by Aufbau in East Berlin was delayed because the Central Publishing Administration of the Ministry of Culture – the censorship arm of the German Democratic Republic – objected to certain formulations in the third lecture and made the publication of the lectures as a whole contingent upon commensurate changes. Christa Wolf was not willing to accommodate; she insisted that the omissions be at least made visible. The relevant segments were struck by the publisher and marked by a symbol of omission - [...]. The third lecture is followed by the annotation “(abbreviated version).” Within the history of East German censorship, this was a formidable event that can be gleaned from Christa Wolf's collected works. However, the only way to interpret these symbols as censorship is through familiarity with the background of the text and the various east and west editions. Since the third lecture consists of diary entries, they could easily be interpreted as omissions by the author herself.

Beyond these textual distinctions, however, both editions reveal variances in the layout and not least in the composition of the texts. While the lectures and the narrative appeared in two separate books in the Federal Republic and certainly therefore were generally perceived as such in their reception as well, the Aufbau edition published them collected in one volume that included numerous black and white photographs as well. Christa Wolf's son-in-law, Martin Hoffmann, was responsible for the image editing as well as the one-volume layout – as he had been for her earlier and later books. Most of the photographs are the private property of Christa and Gerhard Wolf.

Of particular interest to me in this example is the fact that handwritten copies of the deleted passages were circulating in the German Democratic Republic very shortly after the publication of the Aufbau edition. Many private copies of the censored January 1984 and later Aufbau edition contain inserted handwritten pages that restored the missing sentences to the published text.

The *Cassandra* text is altered accordingly, because the inserted pages are not necessarily identical with Christa Wolf's manuscript or the Luchterhand edition. The pages in the copy I have are written in blue ink on light blue paper and are numbered with the respective page number. In spite of the obvious care taken with the copy, corrections had still been made and other mistakes went unnoticed or also uncorrected. Since these pages were produced by an anonymous reader, one can only speculate about the circumstances under which the copy took place – if discovered, the copy probably would have been seized and punished – and what the actual source of copy was.³

For Christa Wolf's 60th birthday, the first complete East German edition was published by Aufbau in March 1989. This complete edition deviates from earlier Aufbau editions in the number of pages (350 pages – 364 pages); the shortened edition and the complete edition are hardly distinguishable at first glance: both the cover design and the colophon page indicate that this is one and the same text.

This example makes it clear how problematic an abstract notion of text can be even in its application to almost solely written material. In contrast, if one speaks of the document complex *Cassandra* that consists of a variety of documents, it is possible to take the differences in media as well as the various textual versions into consideration. By asking which means of production Christa Wolf as well as others used, such as typograph, one-band volumes, etc., one can then investigate not only the relationship between content and form but also the effects of the various media.

Using the *docem* term makes it additionally possible to analyze more closely the discrete parts of the documents within the complex of documents. If we view the loose leaves added to the already bound book as *docems* without which the document would be incomplete, we are

³ With regard to literature published under undemocratic conditions, the example used here is hardly unique. Cf. for example Mikhael Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* in Samizdat: 2000, 283.

taking the relationship between print text and manuscript and between author and reader into consideration, as well as the perhaps “official” producers. Since we are talking about loose pages, one can imagine that at least a few individual pages were damaged over the course of time or even lost entirely. It’s not certain whether the owner of the book had access to several copies or not. At the same time, the loose leaves must have had advantages for the reader: they could be inserted into the book at the right spots and then maybe taken back out again and stored separately. Since a fountain pen was used to make the copy, the reader’s individuality is expressed through handwriting.

In the historical context it is nearly impossible to make more precise statements on the frequency of these “text completions.” Nonetheless, we know that Christa Wolf’s texts went into many reprint and that the censorship heightened interest in the text and the “non-text.” Since Christa Wolf’s texts commanded a virtual cult following and the censored passages were treated like treasures, one can assume that there probably are quite a few copies of *Cassandra* completed by hand that differ from each other because of this docem. Since these unbound pages can vary highly in appearance and can be inserted and removed again, they are reminiscent more of less stabile document types than a printed book.

⁴ Of the West German edition alone, 90,000 copies of the lectures and 150,000 copies of the narrative had been sold by 1985.

Illustrations

1) Christa Wolf: *Kassandra*. Erzählung. Mit elf Radierungen von Nuria Quevedo. Leipzig 1984. p. 8 and 9.

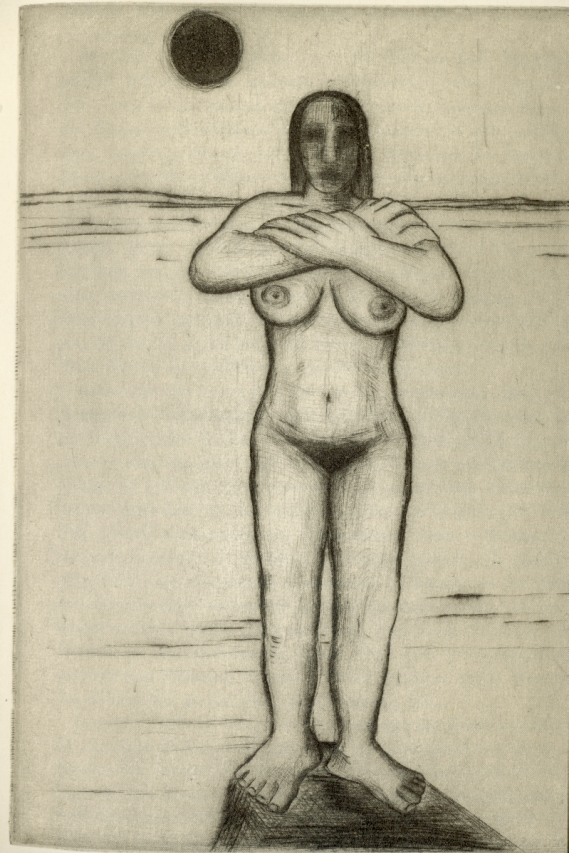
8 Löwen fiel, die über mich und alles hinwegsaht und immer hinwegsehn werden. Angst kenn ich ja, doch dies ist etwas andres. Vielleicht kommt es in mir zum erstenmal vor, nur um gleich wieder erschlagen zu werden. Jetzt wird der Kern geschliffen.

Jetzt ist meine Neugier, auch auf mich gerichtet, gänzlich frei. Als ich dies erkannte, schrie ich laut, auf der Überfahrt, ich, wie alle, elend, vom Seegang durchgewalkt, naß bis auf die Haut vom überspritzenden Gischt, belästigt vom Geheul und den Ausdünstungen der anderen Troerinnen, mir nicht wohlgesonnen, denn immer wußten alle, wer ich bin. Nie war es mir vergönnt, in ihrer Menge unterzutauchen, zu spät hab ich es mir gewünscht, zuviel hab ich, in meinem früheren Leben, dazu getan, gekannt zu sein. Auch Selbstvorwürfe hindern die wichtigen Fragen, sich zu sammeln. Jetzt wuchs die Frage, wie die Frucht in der Schale, und als sie sich ablöste und vor mir stand, schrie ich laut, vor Schmerz oder Wonne:

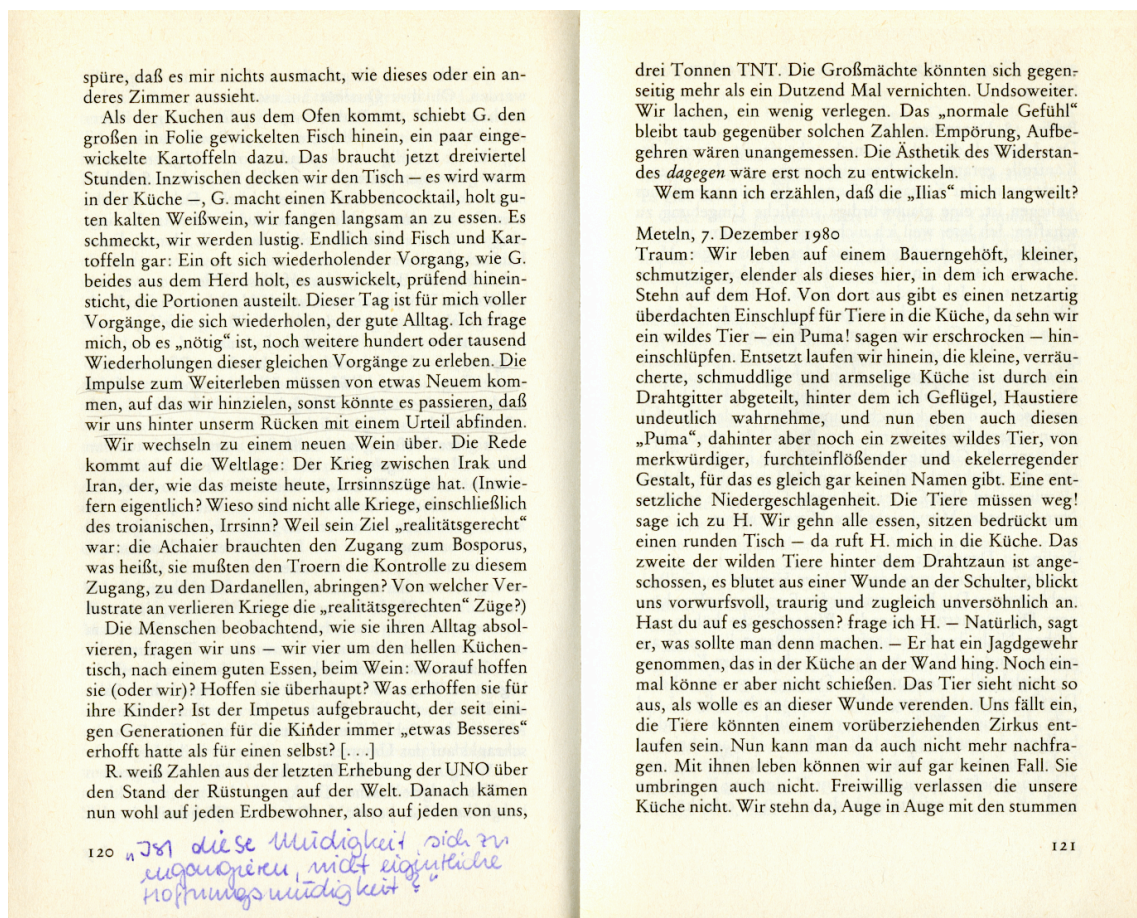
Warum wollte ich die Sehergabe unbedingt?

Es traf sich, daß der König Agamemnon, der »sehr Entschlossene« (Götter!), mich in jener Sturmnacht aus dem Knäuel der andern Leiber riß, mein Schrei damit zusammenfiel, andere Deutung nicht brauchte. Ich, ich sei es gewesen, schrie er mich an, besinnungslos vor Angst, die Poseidon gegen ihn aufgehetzt habe. Habe er dem Gott nicht drei seiner besten Pferde vor der Überfahrt geopfert? Und Athene? sagte ich kalt. Was hast du ihr geopfert? Ich sah ihn blaß werden. Alle Männer sind ichbezogene Kinder. (Aineias? Unsinn. Aineias ist ein erwachsener Mensch.) Spott? In den Augen einer Frau? Das ertragen sie nicht. Der Siegerkönig hätte mich erschlagen — und das war es, was ich wollte —, hätte er nicht auch vor mir noch Angst gehabt. Immer hat dieser Mensch mich für eine Zauberin gehalten. Ich sollte Poseidon beschwichtigen! Er stieß mich an den Bug, riß mir die Arme hoch zu der Gebärde, die er für passend hielt. Ich bewegte die Lippen. Du armer Wicht, was schert dich, ob du hier ertrinkst oder zu Hause erschlagen wirst?

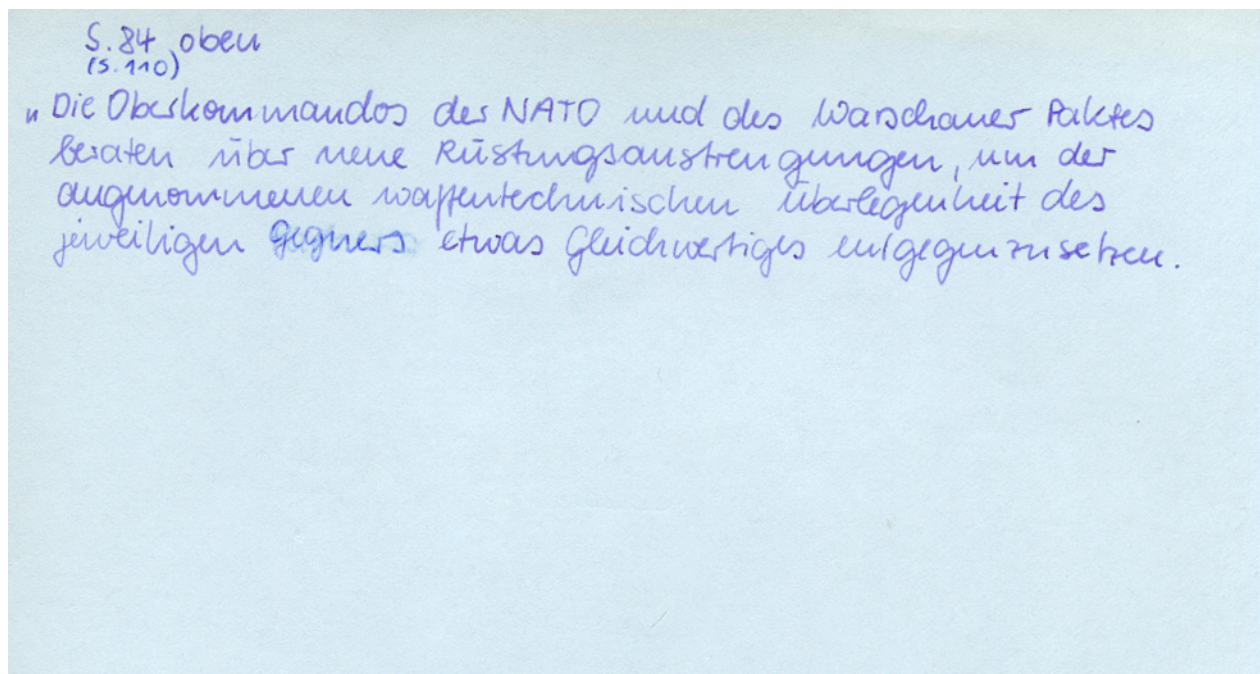
Wenn Klytāimnestra war, wie ich sie mir vorstellte, konnte sie mit diesem Nichts den Thron nicht teilen. — Sie ist, wie ich sie mir vorstellte. Dazu noch haßerfüllt. Als er sie noch beherrschte, mag es der Schwächling, wie sie es alle tun, wüst genug mit ihr getrieben haben. Da ich nicht nur die Männer, sondern, was schwieriger ist, auch die Frauen kenne,



2) Christa Wolf: *Kassandra*. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung. Berlin and Weimar 1983. p. 120 and 121.



3) Handwritten copy



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